

SPORT AND RECREATION — SOCIAL DIVIDENDS

498. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Sport and Recreation:

Can the minister please advise the house on how the Liberal–National government is using sport and recreation as a mechanism to deliver better social outcomes to our communities?

Mr T.K. WALDRON replied:

I thank the member for Swan Hills. He has had me out to his electorate. He is doing a good job out there, particularly in sport and recreation for some of those new areas, where it is very important. People laugh, and that is the problem. We tend to underestimate the value of sport and recreation and what it delivers. That is what I want to talk about today, because it is really important, and I am grateful for that opportunity. I will talk about the Northbridge youth engagement program, which is really delivering significant social dividends to the Cities of Swan and Armadale and also to one of our most popular entertainment precincts, Northbridge. We all know that there have been some issues there.

I talk a lot about what sport and recreation does; I fully believe in it. The more I am in this role, the more I see it, and this government is grasping it. There are benefits we see daily. Everyone knows and talks about the physical and the mental health benefits from sport and recreation, but we as a government are always trying to do more in this area. We are using sport and recreation to help reduce some of that antisocial behaviour that people have to put up with, and we are trying to provide strategies to get better social and justice outcomes. If we can help young kids and keep them away from trouble, I think we are doing the right thing by them and the right thing by our communities.

Just by way of background, the engagement programs started back in January 2010 in response to our government's initiative to reduce the incidence of young people entering Northbridge on Friday and Saturday nights and causing problems and getting themselves into situations they should not get into. We had discussions with service providers in the Northbridge precinct. We consulted with all the agencies—the Department for Child Protection, its Young People in Northbridge Project team, the Cities of Swan and Armadale—which have been terrific in this. They were identified by the Department of Sport and Recreation as priority areas to be part of this program.

We have established in the two areas a program to divert young people who otherwise visit Northbridge. There are a range of sport, recreation, art and cultural activities on Friday nights in our local areas. I just want to stress that sport and recreation is working with arts and culture. Over the years we always hear of the fights or so-called fights between those two groups. The minister and I are trying to work together wherever possible, because it is a different way of delivering things, but in a lot of the ways we deliver the very same benefits. Working together, I think we can actually deliver it better. This is a real example of it. This program targets young people between 10 and 16 years of age who live in those local areas in addition to the unsupervised people we see detained in Northbridge and other target areas. Some of these kids are the most at-risk young people we see. When I have been out to some of these projects on the nights they are run, I have found that most of the kids are good kids. It is just about giving them an opportunity, and that is what we are trying to do. It will not always be 100 per cent successful. I will just go on and tell members about that success. I just want to acknowledge the partnership, because these things cannot be done without the partnerships. I want to acknowledge the Midland PCYC, the Champion Lakes Christian Church and the Armadale PCYC. These organisations are partnering across our government and other not-for-profit youth organisations. They are offering this opportunity with us. On any given night in the areas of Swan or Armadale, there are young people engaged in structured dance, acrobatics, pool, table tennis, jewellery making, discos as well as the midnight basketball program. These activities are complemented by a meal and by taking the kids home. I think those last two—the transport home and the evening meal—are critical elements of this program.

I am really delighted in what is being delivered. Quickly, before I finish, I will give some statistics. Base data was collected prior to the implementation of the program. Two years post that implementation, we have other data. It shows that the number of children being picked up in Northbridge from those targeted communities has been halved in the course of these programs. We have actually halved the number. In fact, in recent weeks we have had instances when no young kids have been picked up from these areas. We know from going out there that a lot of the action happening at Midland and Armadale has been successful. As a result of that, we are now going to look at two other priority areas to expand this program. I think this is again about our government investing in social delivery through sport and recreation.